







152
433. 1
152

ALCOTT MEMOIRS

POSTHUMOUSLY COMPILED FROM PAPERS
JOURNALS AND MEMORANDA OF THE LATE

DR. FREDERICK L. H. WILLIS

BY E. W. L. & H. B.



BOSTON: RICHARD G. BADGER
TORONTO: THE COPP, CLARK COMPANY, LIMITED

Copyright, 1915, by Richard G. Badger

All Rights Reserved

THE GORHAM PRESS, BOSTON, U. S. A.

PRELUDE

SO much has been written of the famous men and women of New England whose lives compassed approximately the years 1800 to 1870, that little if anything remains to be told. No pretense is here made to supply such deficiency if it exists.

This little book aims at naught else than a presentation of a personal point of view wherein alone lies whatever of originality it may contain. It in no sense presumes to offer original matter save from the angle of individually recorded impression. I offer its pages as a tribute to my father and not as a contribution to the already extensive literature concerning the early literary period of New England. So far as possible dates and facts have been verified, but no exhaustive effort has been made to present historic or biographic matter, the object being to preserve neither people nor events, but my father's memory of them.

I have eliminated all references that might be deemed critical or over-laudatory, that might create controversy, or that touched upon the more sacred human relationships, believing this would have been

Prelude

my father's wish. For some years prior to his death, my father planned writing his personal recollections of a long, varied and unusual life during which he was associated more or less intimately with distinguished men and women in America and Europe. To this end he made many notes from some of which the following pages have been educed. The infirmities of age made writing a great exertion and prevented the carrying out of his purpose save in a preliminary way, and his papers were left in great confusion. Through the patient effort of Henri Bazin these notes and memoranda, many of them hardly legible because of the tremulous handwriting sometimes employed during sleepless nights and hours of great pain, have been copied, arranged in sequential and chronological order, and brought into a presentable whole. It may be that my father has quoted some of the matter herein presented; it is not claimed that the notes he left were in any way ready for the presentation he intended. I offer no apology along these lines because I well know the following pages are fragmentary and merely suggestive of what he would have written. They have been gathered as one would gather the fallen petals of a rose to make fragrant a roseless hour.

My father's long life can best be described in the words, charity, integrity, courtesy. Through the

Prelude

vicissitudes of an unusually active, cosmopolitan life, through a long period of ill health and physical infirmity, up to the last moments of his last illness he never faltered in his thought of others, in his chivalrous bearing and in the kindness and love that radiated from his personality, and his life was crowned with the best of earth's blessings—the love of all who knew him.

EDITH WILLIS LINN.

Eden Glen, Glenora, N. Y.
November, 1915.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. CHILDHOOD	11
II. HOW I MET THE ALCOTT FAMILY	19
III. FAMILY LIFE	24
IV. LOUISA AND HER SISTERS	35
V. ALCOTT THE PHILOSOPHER	46
VI. ALCOTT THE ABOLITIONIST	65
VII. FRUITLANDS	80
VIII. EMERSON	87
IX. THOREAU	91
X. MARGARET FULLER	95
XI. HAWTHORNE	98
XII. THOMAS STARR KING	100
POSTSCRIPT—THE INFLUENCES THAT MOLD	104

ALCOTT MEMOIRS

ALCOTT MEMOIRS

I

CHILDHOOD

FREDERICK LLEWELLYN HOVEY WILLIS, a learned and modest man beloved of all who knew him, died in Rochester, N. Y., on Easter Sunday, April 12th, 1914, aged eighty-four years and three months. He was a Unitarian clergyman, a doctor of medicine, a lecturer of some renown, a nature lover, and a writer of power and charm.

From the age of fourteen to that of nearly twenty-four, he was constantly and intimately connected with the Alcott family, as friend, boarder, or guest in their home. During that period he was loved and regarded as a son by the Sage of Still River Village and Concord and by his wife, the "Marmee" of "Little Women," and was also, during the Still River summer of 1844 and the several successive summers at Concord, the only boy playmate of Louisa Alcott and her sisters, with the

Alcott Memoirs

single exception of William, son of Charles Lane.

Despite this authenticated fact, Dr. Willis never laid positive claim to the character of "Laurie," the hero of Louisa Alcott's classic, although he would smile in his charming manner when, now and then, in public print or conversation, the claim was made for him by others.

The purpose of this little book is not to do so either. It aims but to carry out the intention of his declining years: the recording of memoirs of an interesting period in his childhood and youth, with his retrospect of this period's influences upon a sensitive and beautiful nature through close association with Mr. and Mrs. Alcott and contact in the Alcott homes with Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and other New Englanders who have left fame and name in American Letters.

Dr. Willis was born in Cambridge, Mass., January 29th, 1830. He was the only child of Lorenzo Dow Willis and his wife Eleanor Hovey. Lorenzo Dow Willis was a cousin of Nathaniel Parker Willis of early New England literary fame, and the ancestors of both him and his wife were among the early settlers of New England. He was a liberal in religion and the marriage was strongly opposed by the Hovey family upon religious grounds, but love prevailed. Lorenzo Dow Willis was a prosperous merchant of Cam-

Childhood

bridge at the time of his marriage, but shortly after, his partner in business absconding with all the funds of their enterprise, he was thrown into a debtor's prison.

The Hovey family consisted of several brothers who were men of more than usual wealth and could have easily settled the affairs of their sister's husband had they been so inclined, but in those days to be a liberal was an unpardonable crime, and the prisoner for debt was in their eyes receiving what he richly deserved. Dr. Willis's father was released from the debtor's prison only in time to be present at the birth of his son. The young wife and mother died the third day after at the age of twenty-two.

Llewellyn, as he was known, was brought up by his grandmother, the wife of Ebeneza Hovey, who before her marriage was Sally Greenwood of Salem, the granddaughter of Colonel Darby of Salem, a famous trader of whom it was said, that he could count nearly a hundred ships in the different ports of the world loading or discharging cargo at any time.

The atmosphere of the Hovey household was one of extreme bigotry. Ebeneza Hovey was one of the founders of the Baptist Church of Cambridge and the society met at his house for service until they were financially strong enough to build

the First Baptist Church in Cambridge. He and his eight children constituted the choir of this church. All possessed fine voices and several played upon instruments. Indeed, the music of the family seems to have been its one bright feature. The grandmother had a remarkable voice and sang many curious old hymns now obsolete, among them:

THE STRANGER AND HIS FRIEND

A poor wayfaring man of grief
Hath often crossed me on my way,
Who sued so humbly for relief,
That I could never answer “nay”:
I had not power to ask his name,
Whither he went or whence he came,
Yet was there something in his eye
That won my heart, I knew not why.

Once when my scanty meal was spread
He entered; not a word he spake;—
Just famishing for want of bread,
I gave him all; he blessed it, brake
And ate, but gave me part again;
Mine was an Angel’s portion then,
For while I fed with eager haste,
That crust was manna to my taste.

And so on through all the seven verses of James Montgomery’s quaint old poem set to music of a lilting, haunting, murmurous melody; and another beginning,

Childhood

The Lord into his garden comes,
The spices yield a rich perfume,
The lilies grow and thrive-ive-ive,
The lilies grow and thrive.
Refreshing showers of grace divine,
From Jesus flows to every vine,
Which makes the dead revive-ive-ive,
Which makes the dead revive.

As an infant Llewellyn was given to a mother of twins to nurse, who nourished and raised all three children. When the boy was old enough to be weaned, he was, because he was a delicate child and his father had died meanwhile, sent to board with an old woman in the country. This woman, of whose name there is no record, gloried in a lovely old-fashioned garden in which she raised a profusion of medicinal herbs, and every flower that would grow in the climate of Eastern Massachusetts. Here the first lasting impression came to the brain of the boy, for he remembered toddling after her as she labored in the garden among her loved flowers, his reward for good behavior being the privilege of patting the camomile bed to produce more luxuriant growth. While he was too young to remember her name, since he was taken from her care while yet very tiny, it was in this garden and in the company of this old woman that he gained his initial love of flowers and his interest in plants which not only grew to a science

Alcott Memoirs

with him and remained a loved passion all his life, but was the original stepping stone towards his unique and fascinating lectures upon *materia-medica*, when Professor of that Chair in Mrs. Lozier's Medical College for Women in New York City, the first Woman's Medical College in the United States; lectures in which his rare knowledge of plants played so interesting and instructive a part.

When he was about four years of age he was brought into the household of his grandmother and grandfather in Cambridge. Preparation for the life hereafter was the dominating factor there. The fear of God's wrath was constantly impressed upon all the family, including the sensitive, delicate boy, who was of their blood yet alien to them. Prayers were constant; the most rigorous censorship was maintained regarding books, and upon Saturday nights every printed thing was placed out of sight except the Bible, "Pilgrim's Progress," and Baxter's "Saint's Rest."

But from the New England attic have emerged many wonderful fairies with gifts to the lives of men, and this boy whose nature was dwarfed and narrowed by the severity of his surroundings was led by them to discover a box of books that had belonged to his atheistic father. No complete record remains of their titles; memory holds some of them. There was the "Mysteries of Udolpho," "Swiss

Childhood

Family Robinson," "The Boy's Own Book," "Alonzo and Melissa," "Robinson Crusoe," Sir Walter Scott's and Charles Dickens's novels and, probably the books that most helped to mold and fashion the mind of the boy, all the writings of that arch-infidel, that great lovable, brave, patriotic man, Tom Paine. There in the attic the boy pored over these pages and, not content with the hours stolen from lessons or play, read nights by candle light. No lights were allowed in the bedrooms of himself or his cousins, so he picked up discarded pieces of brass and iron which he sold to a junk dealer and with the proceeds bought candles. In the same way he secured money for surreptitious visits to the Boston Museum, where his soul was awakened and stirred by the fine old English tragedies acted by William Warren and Mrs. Vincent and the Shakespearean reproductions of Forrest and Kean, and his imagination thrilled by the awesome wax works with which the mysterious upper portions of the Museum were stored.

The boy received his first instruction in the public schools of Cambridge, and was later apprenticed to a Cambridge apothecary. When he was seven, he "got religion" in the old-fashioned sense. It was a great struggle to make himself feel all the emotions that were deemed necessary in his grandfather's house, but he thought he achieved it and was

very proud.

He was so very devout that the women of the Baptist Society patted him upon the cheek and called him "a little lamb of God." Yet he did not quite understand, and there was in his nature an unconscious resistance to the bigotry and fanaticism of the household; for he remembered sitting up in his little bed upon Sunday nights, after listening to the portrayal of the wrathful God of the Puritans, and shaking his little fist at the darkness, saying aloud, "God, I hate you," and then being very much afraid.

At the age of twelve, because of his assertion of his disbelief in foreordination he was expelled from the church as a heretic. He said, "I told them I could not fore-ordain a creature to eternal damnation and I was quite sure God was as loving as I, and they put me out of the church." That such a thing could happen to a child of such tender years seems to us to-day impossible. Its effect upon the boy's character was to sadden and subdue and enhance a natural tendency to introspection and subjective study. His meeting with the Alcotts two years after came to him as a burst of sunshine upon a gray day and in a field already prepared, the seeds of Mr. Alcott's philosophy and the loving influence of Mrs. Alcott's motherly care found ready root.

II

HOW I MET THE ALCOTT FAMILY

DR. WILLIS thus describes his meeting with the Alcott family in 1844. The account is in his own handwriting, tremulous yet firm withal, written very shortly before his death, and after he had passed his eighty-third year: "A delicate boy of fourteen, I was journeying in early June, 1844, from Boston to Still River Village in the town of Harvard, in one of the lumbering stage-coaches which at that time had not been displaced by the steam railway, save upon a few important thoroughfares, to spend my long summer vacation as boarder in the home of a relative.

It chanced after one of the stops made by the stage, that upon starting again, the fingers of my right hand were caught in the closing door. I fainted from the intense pain and upon my consciousness returning, I opened my eyes upon what seemed the dearest, kindest, most motherly face I had ever beheld, looking into mine, as a lady held me in an embrace as tender and as pitying as if I had been one of her own bantlings, rather than

a little orphan stranger traveling alone of whom she knew nothing.

It was Mrs. Alcott, who was returning from Boston, where she had been to solicit aid in her then constant extremity from wealthy relatives and friends. With ready tact, to divert my mind from my suffering fingers, she began to describe to me in lovable manner her four girls at home; and she told me stories of their juvenile pranks until the pain was a forgotten thing and the remaining hours of the journey had been delightfully whiled away.

When the stage drew up at her door there burst out four merry-hearted, bright-eyed, laughing girls —Anna, Louisa, Lizzie and May—my first sight of the Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, immortalized afterwards in “Little Women.” Then ensued the prettiest possible struggle, while the driver was taking down the old hairecloth trunk, for “Marmee’s” first kiss. The next day, as I had promised, I called upon the “Little Women.” School had just closed in Still River and the long summer vacation had begun. I shall never forget the awkwardness of this first call. The mother was absent, only the children were at home. I was a city boy—a new genus to the young ladies—widely different in dress and manner from the boys of the village school, and as I stood, a focus of concentrated gaze from four pairs of bright mischievous eyes, not a syllable be-

How I Met the Alcott Family

ing uttered meanwhile by any one of their owners, I felt as if I were being weighed in the balance. I could feel the hot blood mounting to my cheek and brow. At length Louisa, who suddenly seemed to realize the embarrassment of the situation for me, proposed an adjournment to the garden. There the ice was broken, relieving seemingly strained relations, and we were comrades from that time forth. This first interview was ever after the subject of laughing comment with us. Within a week I had secured my grandmother's permission to change my boarding place, and thus live at Mrs. Alcott's house.

There was a beautiful sheet of water in among the hills about a mile from the village, unprosaically called Bare Hill Pond. Here was our favorite resort. Thither we went, Anna, Louisa and myself, the other two girls being deemed too young, passing day after day, carrying our luncheon and whatever Mrs. Alcott thought wise in the way of wraps, and story books, in a little four-wheeled cart. And here, through all the bright days of July and August, we lived in the fairy land of imagination, a life of childish romance. We christened a favorite nook, a beautiful rocky glen carpeted with moss and adorned with ferns opening upon the water's edge, "Spiderland." I was the King of the realm, Anna was the Queen, and Lou-

isa, the Princess Royal; we never laid these characters aside as long as we were in the "Royal Realm." Louisa had even then begun to string her rhymes and weave her little romances, though but twelve years old. For years afterwards we talked of that summer as the golden era of our lives.

I was then too young to realize the financial struggle Mrs. Alcott was passing through to keep her little family together; but after they removed to Concord I spent the vacations of several successive summers with them, when I realized the whole situation most forcibly; and as much as I revered and admired Mr. Alcott—he had a peculiar charm for the young—I remember feeling a burning sense of indignation at his seeming indifference to the domestic burden that was resting upon his devoted wife and the actual poverty that enshrouded the little family. Mrs. Alcott became very fond of me and truly looked upon me as a son. As I look back I can think of but one other woman with whom I came in contact during my entire life who so fully represented sympathy, love, and tenderness.

During the times when burdens pressed heavily upon Mrs. Alcott through the poverty and frequent actual want that was ever at the door, she had always a word of counsel, encouragement and

How I Met the Alcott Family

cheer. She never turned a deaf ear to an appeal from whomsoever it might have been and frequently shared her own scanty store with others aside from her own.

I think I was the only person, apart from her family, in whom she confided, a confidence years alone did not warrant. I remember one occasion while she was talking to me she suddenly burst into tears, which was a thing quite unusual. Just then Anna came in announcing a caller. A most kindly looking and motherly woman entered, garbed simply as a Quakeress. Seeing the tears upon Mrs. Alcott's cheeks, she said:

“Abba Alcott, what is the matter with thee?”

“Oh, nothing much. But much or little, this dear boy is my little comforter.”

It was thus that I met for the first time Lydia Maria Child, whose brother, Dr. Converse Francis, was afterwards my instructor at Harvard. He and Mrs. Child were my warm friends the remainder of their lives.”

III

FAMILY LIFE

THE following summers, four in number, Dr. Willis passed with the Alcotts at Concord, and later, when they moved to Boston, boarded with them while preparing for Harvard College Divinity School, and acting as amanuensis for Thomas Starr King. He became their most intimate young friend and was closely associated with every detail of their life struggle with the poverty that only ceased with the success of "Little Women" in 1868. Through this intimate association he was informed in full detail of the financial perplexities as they had existed before he met the Alcotts in 1844.

In his notes upon the Concord period, Dr. Willis records:

"Through continued and dire poverty Mrs. Alcott was sunshine itself to her children and to me, whom she looked upon as a son. No matter how weary she might be with the washing and ironing, the baking and cleaning, it was all hidden from the group of girls with whom she was always ready to enter into fun and frolic, as though she never had

Family Life

a care. Afternoons we usually gathered in the quaint, simple, charming, old-fashioned parlor at Hillside—Hawthorne's old home—bought by Mrs. Alcott with the pittance she received from her father's estate made sufficient for the purpose by a donation of \$500 from Ralph Waldo Emerson. To this day, over all the years, that simple Concord room with its pretty chintz curtains, its cool matting, its few fine engravings, its Parian busts of Clytie and Pestalozzi, and of Una and the Lion (the latter given Mrs. Alcott by Una Hawthorne), its books and cut flowers, and its indescribable atmosphere of refinement, is deeply engraved within my memory as an expression of inherent simplicity and charm.

One of our number, usually myself, would read aloud while the mother and the two elder daughters engaged in the family sewing. Thus we read Scott, Dickens, Cooper, Hawthorne, Shakespeare and the British poets, and George Sand's "Consuelo." Mrs. Alcott's comments upon and explanations of our reading, when we questioned, were most instructive to us in beauty of expression, and revealed the wealth of her own richly stored mind. Mr. Alcott's table talks were constantly delightful. It was particularly at these times he took especial care to so discourse that the youngest listener might comprehend and fully understand. I

Alcott Memoirs

have seen him take an apple upon his fork, and while preparing it for eating, give a fascinating little lecture as to its growth and development from germ to matured fruit, his language quaintly beautiful and charmingly poetical.

A child in speaking of him in my hearing said: "I love to hear him talk. He is so plain and tells me much I didn't know, fastening it on to what I know."

He rarely talked of else at table but nature's wonderful and benevolent processes in preparing food for the maintenance of man and in ministering to his taste through her countless presentations of the beautiful. Indeed his great love of nature, his keen, close observation of all her processes and his power of expression, all combined to make him charmingly instructive and entertaining.

Even in my youth Mr. Alcott seemed to me always strangely out of place in the midst of the practical utilitarianism of the 19th century, and out of place, too, clad in modern broadcloth. He should have been of the days of Socrates or Seneca and worn the flowing robes of classic Greece or the toga of ancient Rome. He was possessed of a captivating yet almost childlike simplicity of manner and bore about with him an air of serene repose, contrasting sharply with the bustling, business-like manner of most of the literary men of those days.

Family Life

In person he was tall and spare, his fine head crowned with silvery locks, his complexion remarkable for its clearness and purity, the flesh tints being as clearly white and red as those of an infant. I have fancied this was due, in large measure, to the simplicity of his diet, which was principally fruit and cereals. He was fond of some varieties of vegetables, giving preference to those that matured above the ground, saying, "Man, like the gods, should pluck his food from on high." Meat he positively abhorred. Morally and physically he was the cleanest and sweetest of men. His entire sphere radiated purity. He was exceedingly tender towards all animals, having that reverence for life, even in its most insignificant forms, that characterizes the followers of Buddha. He would not crush a worm.

He was endowed with rich intellect and a broad humanitarian spirit; but he was also *sui generis*; a rare and elevating model of a man, not to be measured by ordinary standards. His sublime indifference to the practical affairs of life and apparently to the heroic struggles of his devoted wife was not indicative of his lack of affection for her or for his children. For no man loved his family better, and although at times he sorely tried them by his utter lack of practicability their affection and reverence for him never faltered. Mrs. Alcott

Alcott Memoirs

struck the keynote of his character when I heard her say: "He carries his head in the clouds."

Mrs. Alcott was Abba May, daughter of Col. Joseph May, for many years one of the wardens of Kings Chapel, Boston. He was a strikingly handsome old gentleman and I well remember him as a conspicuous figure in the streets of Boston in my early boyhood, not only because of his fine carriage, but because he wore until his death the picturesque Continental costume which, at that time, was practically obsolete. The "small clothes," with knee and shoe buckles set with brilliants, made a fine setting for his shapely limbs. He stood as a model for the body of Stuart's portrait of Washington, a picture, for aught I know, still hanging in Faneuil Hall. It has been said he was the figure O. W. Holmes refers to in his poem, "The Last Leaf."

By descent Mrs. Alcott was a Jewett, one of the most ancient of Boston families. She was one of the noblest and most practical women I ever knew, large-brained and whole-souled, with the manners of a queen; a head like Harriet Martineau, but a heart incomparably larger, and endowed with fascinating powers of conversation. She bore Mr. Alcott's utter impracticability with wonderful patience; equal to any emergency in any direction, no matter how exceedingly tried. I can remember

Family Life

but two or three instances where she manifested impatience. Once, at some outrageously impractical thing her husband had done, she exclaimed impetuously: "I do wish people who carry their heads in the clouds would occasionally take their bodies with them." And I recall her saying upon another occasion: "If I should send my husband for a quart of milk, I should fully expect to have him drive home a cow."

It was at Concord, in the refined, simple room where the family gathered for mutual happy communion, for under all circumstances happiness reigned supreme in this household, that Dr. Willis, now regarded with the affection centered upon a son and brother by the entire family, was informed by Mrs. Alcott as to the life at *Fruitlands*.

In so far as it is consistently possible it is the purpose of this book to follow a chronological recording of the continuous period, of a trifle less than ten years, during which Dr. Willis was either a guest or a boarder in the Alcott family: the three periods of Still River Village, Concord, and the Pinckney and High Street houses in Boston; touching in a general manner upon the impressions received in these homes;—impressions that formed in a large manner the man of charm, beauty of thought and expression—; and then to return in a series of more complete individual records formed in after

Alcott Memoirs

years—riper years—of Mr. Alcott and his daughters, as well as some of the distinguished people whom he met through them.

Of Fruitlands, Dr. Willis's notes say: "It was in Concord in 1846, that Mrs. Alcott told me the story of the failure of Mr. Alcott's 'Tremont Street' school conducted in the Masonic Temple, a failure she largely attributed to the merciless ridiculing of Harriet Martineau, saying, I well remember, 'Thus Harriet Martineau took the bread from the mouths of my family,' and then spoke of Fruitlands. In substance her story, told me with smiling emotion, was as follows: After the failure of the school, Mr. Alcott, upon visiting England, became acquainted with an Englishman of some means, Charles Lane, a man who was thoroughly imbued with his own transcendentalism, and was also a believer in Robert Owen's Communistic ideas. Together, after returning to America, Mr. Alcott and Mr. Lane attempted to found an Utopian community in the town of Harvard. They bought a land-worn farm of about ninety acres with an old house and barn upon it, which they repaired and christened Fruitlands, Mrs. Alcott said in subtle irony, since there was no fruit upon the place save what little might be looked for from a few venerable apple trees, less than a dozen in number, and Mr. Alcott, his family,

Family Life

Mr. Lane and his young son, with at the outset five others, took up their abode there. With the single exception of Mrs. Alcott, no adult among them possessed a modicum of common sense, there was but one practical agriculturist among them and he an old man, and to any thinking person the experiment was foredoomed to failure. Under the ideals forecast but one ending could be possible.

Indeed in any age the scheme of Fruitlands would have been impossible since it was eminently impractical of application to the simple principles of common sense. The original plan, which for obvious reason to even these visionaries could not be adhered to verbatim, was a remarkable one. All labor was to be manual, man to supersede ox or horse, and the spade to entirely replace the plow. The pastures were to be transformed into bearing orchards as if by the magic touch of the gods and naught was to be raised save fruit, grain, and vegetables. These were not to be 'cultivated,' but would, it was firmly believed, mature and ripen in substance for the needs of the community through Nature's processes alone, unaided by any fertilization or even any labor saving the sowing and reaping. No living thing upon the ninety acres of Fruitlands was to be destroyed, neither weed nor worm, since all living things were God's creatures entitled to their natural or preferred sustenance.

Alcott Memoirs

Water was to be the only beverage, tea and coffee tabooed since their production in the lands from whence they came involved the use of slave labor. For the same reason sugar or even salt were not to be used. Milk, butter, and cheese were considered as polluting as the flesh which was their source, and eggs condemned for the same reason. The day was to begin with the dawn, when every one, young or old, should arise. Every day was planned upon the lines of its predecessor; beginning by bathing the body, this to be followed by music prior to the breakfast of fruit, bread made from unbolted flour, and water. From breakfast to the midday meal every one was to find an useful and congenial occupation, not essentially one that urgently needed to be done but rather to the daily taste and pleasure of the worker. After the midday meal rest for the body from the labor of the morning was to be found in serious conversation that would, too, develop the mind. From thence to the evening meal the same congenial labor of the morning was to be engaged in, the company then assembling for exchange of thought and conversation until sundown, when every one was to retire.

No candles or oil were to be allowed since they were of animal source. Despite this edict, Mrs. Alcott told me, she kept a sperm oil lamp which she used only after all had retired for light upon

Family Life

the needed mending of clothing or for the single pleasure of reading. Covering for the body was to be of linen only, since cotton, wool, and silk were not only the product of slave labor, but securable only through the murder of worms and sheep.

With the coming of autumn the bubble burst. The community of Fruitlands decreased person by person until but the Lanes and Alcotts remained. Towards early winter Mr. Lane and his son took their departure, there remaining but Mr. Alcott, his wife and the four girls, the philosopher still steadfast and faithful to his dream. Mr. Lane as owner of the property permitted the Alcotts to remain until a tenant could be found, but denied them the privilege of cutting wood or grinding any more grain. It was then Mr. Alcott's health gave way under the strain. He had firmly believed he was to found in Fruitlands the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth, and so solve for all time the life problem for struggling humanity. His principles were ever a religion to him, and unable to admit defeat even in the face of it, he took to his bed to die. Turning his face to the wall, he refused food and water and silently, with the resignation of a philosopher, waited for death. Mrs. Alcott ministered to him in devotion, silence, and suffering. For weeks, taking but little food at her urgent supplications, his life hovered in the balance; but when

death seemed close at hand, with all else within him faltering, his quality of love for his wife and offspring sustained him as a bird upon a fluttering wing; and with all else within him weary and worn, death even beckoning, through the very quality of his tender passion for his own, he rallied. Thus he struggled back to life again. His heroic wife encouraged and comforted him, sold everything she could spare from their slender stock of household goods, and rented four rooms from a neighbor who owned a house in a village near by. Thither they moved upon a December day and there Mrs. Alcott sewed and Mr. Alcott chopped wood, together making meager ends meet.

It was thus the family left Fruitlands in poverty to reside in the half of the humble but homelike house in the lovely little village of Still River, still in the town of Harvard, where I made their acquaintance the year following in the manner I have described and through which there came to me the most beautiful friendship of my early life, a friendship lasting through many years. As I write it all comes back to me like a golden halo resting upon the fields of memory.

IV

LOUISA AND HER SISTERS

LOUISA MAY, the Author, the “Joe” of “Little Women,” had a clear olive-brown complexion with brown hair and eyes.

She answered perfectly an ideal of the “Nut Brown Maid”; she was full of spirit and life; impulsive and moody, and at times irritable and nervous. She could run like a gazelle. She was the most beautiful girl runner I ever saw. She could leap a fence or climb a tree as well as any boy and dearly loved a good romp. We have many times clambered together into the topmost branches of the tall trees at Hillside. She was passionately fond of Nature, loved the fields and the forests and was in special harmony with animal life. Her brief and racy description of herself in the opening chapter of “Little Women” is most accurately true: “Fifteen-year-old Joe was very tall, thin and brown and reminded one of a colt, for she never seemed to know what to do with her long limbs which were very much in her way. She had a decided mouth, a comical nose, and sharp gray eyes which appeared to see everything and were by turn fierce, funny,

or thoughtful. Her long thick hair was her one beauty, but it was usually bundled into a net out of the way. Round shoulders had Joe, big hands and feet, a fly-away look to her clothes and the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who was rapidly shooting up into a woman, and didn't like it."

Louisa had great love of personal beauty and wide open eyes were her especial admiration. Her own were rather small and, as mine were also, we heartily sympathized with each other on this point. One day after the family had moved to Boston she was walking upon Washington Street. The thought came to her: "Now if I keep my eyes open people will think that I have beautiful large eyes"; so she fixed her eyes in the manner she thought would impart the most captivating expression to her face and continued her promenade. She began to notice that many looked at her intently, and thought as a child might, they were admiring her beautiful eyes, mentally congratulating herself upon the success of her efforts. I had called during her absence and upon her return sat chatting with Anna and her mother. As she entered the room I exclaimed, "Why, Louisa, what on earth ails you?" She made no reply, but walked directly to the mirror, giving, the instant she looked into it, a shriek of horror. She had retained the expression upon her face that she had imagined so enhanced

Louisa and Her Sisters

its beauty until she could get to a mirror and observe for herself its effect, discovering, to her dismay, that she had been parading Washington Street with an insane stare upon her face. Her effort to keep her eyelids open to their widest possible extent had contracted the skin of her forehead into wrinkles and the effect produced was as of an insane person. As she explained to us we burst into shouts of laughter and for a long time afterwards we chaffed her unmercifully upon the "well open eyes."

Louisa was an enthusiastic admirer of Dickens. She reveled in his works and could recite many chapters from memory. His literary style made an indelible impression upon hers and the effect of his humor is very perceptible in all her works. His characters were living beings to her and she was on terms of remarkably close intimacy with all of them. She and her sister Anna often acted in costume, inimitably, the quarrel scene between Sairy Gamp and Betsey Prigg over the imaginary Mrs. Harris, with all the accessories of the "tea podge," and the pickled salmon, Anna taking the part of Betsey Prigg and Louisa of Sairy Gamp. I have rarely seen anything better in comedy by professionals and I recall many instances of Mrs. Alcott laughing until tears came to her eyes over the girls' performances.

I carried the first manuscript to press that Louisa ever offered for publication, a story entitled "The Prince and the Fairy." I took this story to the "Boston Olive Branch," a paper published for many years under the auspices of the Methodist denominations. Rev. and Mrs. C. W. Dennison, at that time well known in the literary circles of Boston, were the editors. Mrs. Dennison read the story in my presence, accepted it, and paid me, for the young author, the munificent sum of \$5.00. I remember well how I bore it to her with as much exultation as if it had been \$5,000. This story filled about one and a half columns of the paper. In comparatively a few years the lowest price received for any article of equal length, she told me, was \$100.

Louisa always lamented she was not born a boy. With the exception of rope skipping, at which she excelled all of us in power of endurance, she preferred boys' games to those of her sex. But nothing gave her more pleasure than plays and tableaux. She would conceive an idea and write a little drama about it, cast all of us in well-chosen parts and direct, with her sister Anna, a fairly creditable children's performance.

One evening during the first summer at Concord Mrs. Alcott mentioned Hamilton Willis of Boston, whom her sister married. I knew well the story

Louisa and Her Sisters

of my father's family and from what I said Mrs. Alcott discovered he was a distant cousin of Hamilton Willis and, that consequently, I was remotely related in law but not in blood. This last decision of "Marmee's" was a source of regret to the two elder sisters, but they decided very seriously that I was a "real cousin" notwithstanding, and that a play should be written telling the story. Louisa forthwith spent two days upon a play she entitled "The Long Lost Cousin," which we performed before Mr. and Mrs. Alcott and Mr. Emerson under the trees about Hillside and in which, under my own name, I was given the principal part. At its end we were to raise our flag upon the cupola of the house. But as we did not have a flag, nor know where we could borrow one, Louisa and Anna, with an old red flannel skirt and some strips of muslin, together with an old blue flannel cape upon which were sewn white muslin stars, made a very creditable looking National banner which was raised with enthusiasm and flew for many days afterwards, to our childish joy and admiration.

Louisa M. Alcott left to the young people of her own and coming generations the legacy of her clean, sweet, and pure books. One might look in vain for any great art in them, but their ethics cannot be questioned nor the brilliancy and sparkling quality of her style. All her books should live. But,

as is often the case, the fame of an author finally rests enshrined within a certain work. Louisa's is "Little Women." Its immense popularity and steadily continued sale through all the years, as well as the wonderful success of the play recently adapted from it, is due directly to its truth and fidelity to real life. But the very slenderest thread of fiction runs through it. And truth, genuine truth sincerely stated, will live within or without the covers of a book. In most of the scenes portrayed in "Little Women" up to the time of Lizzie's death, I enacted a part. Just after this book was published, and when the first edition was selling rapidly, I met Louisa's proud and happy father in the Fitchburg Station in Boston. He came up to me, beaming, and rubbing his hands together in a manner quite peculiar to himself when well pleased, saying: "Well, my boy, did you recognize yourself as Laurie in Louisa's book?" I had just returned from abroad, the book having been issued while I was away, and I had to confess I had not read it. I immediately procured a copy and absorbed with delight its realistic descriptions of familiar, well remembered scenes.

Louisa M. Alcott was noble and true in her impulses. She had a tender and beautiful side to her nature. This quality was charmingly expressed in her hospital experiences during the Civil War,

Louisa and Her Sisters

and in her pathetic “Hospital Sketches” there are very true glimpses of it. She made a brave, heroic, winning struggle through adversity to success and fame, lifting, through this success, the entire family from poverty and deprivation to comfort and affluence. She had a naturally vivacious, keen-witted view of life and was extraordinarily quick at repartee. From my matriculative year at Harvard, until shortly before my marriage, I maintained a correspondence with Louisa. It is a matter of deep regret to me that, together with many papers of value, her letters, which were among my most valued treasures, were stolen. They were full of a sparkling wit and humor, particularly the series written to me during my college life, wherein she was “Mrs. Propriety Coreander” and I was her only son, “Thomas Propriety Coreander.” They were full of frolicsome and serious advice and admonition suitable for every occasion of my college experience and daily conduct.

If I were asked to designate two words best describing Louisa I should say wit and tenderness. Her witticisms were sparkling as a brook and as continuous as its flow. Once when asked a definition of a philosopher she instantly replied, “A man up in a balloon with his family at the strings tugging to pull him down.” Her big heart ached at the burden of poverty under which her family rested

and it was due to the element of tenderness in her nature that she persisted in her literary work through all sorts of failures and disappointments until success crowned her efforts with "Little Women." It has been said that genius is the capacity of taking infinite pains. If so, it is also the capacity of indomitable perseverance. Louisa owed her great success as much to these qualities as to any talent or natural endowment. The "blood and thunder" stories written by her and sold to inferior magazines and newspapers brought a pittance for the family exchequer, but were of more value as practice in the art of story writing. To these she owed her ready style when it came to the writing of her masterpiece. She was ashamed of these stories in later years, but she need not have been, for while they catered to a crude taste they were never unclean or unworthy, or in violation of any canon of propriety or morality.

Her muse was dramatic and had she lived in these days and formulated her talent along dramatic lines her success would have been a marked one.

Elizabeth Sewell, the third daughter, the "Beth" of "Little Women," was aptly named by her father "Little Tranquillity." Pages would not better describe her. She was possessed of an even, lovable disposition, a temperament akin to Mr. Alcott, in-

Louisa and Her Sisters

deed more than akin, since it was a very counterpart. Under any and all conditions she was as sunny and serene as a morning in June. Her appearance was that of a typical Puritan maid. In her book Louisa calls her "a rosy, smooth-haired, bright-eyed girl with a shy manner, a timid voice, and a peaceful expression which was seldom disturbed; she seemed to live in a world of her own, only venturing out to meet the few whom she loved and trusted." She loved music, played the piano with more ease than any of her sisters and with something of real appreciation.

She was possessed of her mother's practicality and housewifely qualities, and at a very early age aided in the preparation of the simple family repasts; later, and particularly while the family lived in Boston and Mrs. Alcott was directing her Intelligence Offices, taking full charge of the family kitchen. She died upon the threshold of womanhood. Her fame rests in the purity and innocent charm of memory she bequeathed to those who knew her and, in the broader sense, the perpetuation of these same qualities to the thousands who have read "Little Women," and hence know her as a wholesome character in a sweet and wholesome story.

Anna Bronson, the eldest of the four girls and the "Meg" of "Little Women," had a clematis

and wild rose complexion, wide open blue eyes, and a wealth of golden hair. The Still River summer, I had nicknamed her “The Ox-eyed Juno” and for years after so called her. She had the calm poise of her father, a more amiable disposition than any of her sisters, was possessed of a quiet, keen sense of humor, and while taking full part in our play enjoyed the fun and frolic with a certain dignified zest that was in no sense a pose but rather a part of her.

She was possessed of genuine dramatic ability and would, as Louisa, have brought honor and credit to the stage had she adopted it as a profession. She married John Pratt, son of Minot Pratt of Concord, and was early left a widow with two sons whom Louisa educated. I had not seen her for many years when shortly after the death of Louisa and Mr. Alcott I called upon her at her home in Boston. She was then the sole surviving member of the family. We spent a pleasant afternoon together talking over the halcyon days of our youth and early friendship. As she bade me good-by she said: “You know you always were our Laurie.”

Abba May, the youngest, and the “Amy” of “Little Women,” was a slender girl with the clear complexion of her father and had blue eyes and golden hair. Being the baby of the family and

Louisa and Her Sisters

much petted she was inclined to be childishly tyrannical at times. "Abby" May, as she was called by all, was very active and, after Louisa, the biggest romp among her sisters. She was fond of sketching and her little drawings were a source of admiration to all of us. That she had genuine talent as an artist was evidenced in her studies abroad after the success of Louisa's book, where it was said she won honors at her chosen profession. She died young, never returning to America, after her marriage, I think in Switzerland, to Ernest Nieriken, an artist, by whom she had one child. I never saw or heard from her after she crossed the Atlantic.

V

ALCOTT THE PHILOSOPHER

AMOS BRONSON ALCOTT above all other things is distinguished as the founder of the first American School of Philosophy. He was “*vera causa*” of the New England School of Transcendentalism, and the most earnest advocate of its religio-philosophical ideas. He enlisted for it the sympathies and active support of his personal friend, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and others. This philosophy had little in concord with Kantism despite the latter doctrine is generally classified as transcendentalistic.

Mr. Alcott’s mental and philosophical attitude, and a distinguished authority’s definition of New England Transcendentalism, are one: “characterized by the absence of a formal system of belief, a somewhat mystical phraseology, the exaltation of the spiritual in a general sense over the material, a tendency to synthesis of God, Nature and man, an acceptance of all human manifestations as natural and not immoral, an apotheosis of Nature, and a belief in the self-sufficiency of the individual and individual insight.”

Alcott the Philosopher

Mr. Alcott aimed at a construction of substances, elements, and average mentalities into new forms, and had the sublime courage of his convictions to such an extent as to make an earnest effort to bring them about. This pure, good, impractical dreamer literally carried his head in the heavens until his dying day. He was as firmly convinced of the practicality of his philosophy after a disastrous experiment, as before it. But he was a true philosopher nevertheless. Long ere his death he realized in a spirit of rare humor his fame would go down to posterity not as an expounder of the science of principles but as his daughter's father. After the phenomenal success of "Little Women," while he was traveling in the middle West, he wrote home to his wife: "I am having a delightful time riding about in Louisa's chariot and being adored everywhere, not for myself nor my beliefs, but as the grandfather of 'Little Women.' "

Practicality and Mr. Alcott were as wide apart as the poles. He was utterly incapable of earning a livelihood and, in consequence, of supporting his family, whom he nevertheless loved in a deeply genuine manner. He had no conception or understanding of the poverty and need in his home, even when straits were dire indeed. Upon one occasion, typical of many ere the success of "Little Women," he was presented by Emerson with \$25. Without

a thought as to the necessities lacking in his household, he expended every penny upon elaborate stationery, which he smilingly brought home as a child would a new toy. I should define Mr. Alcott's philosophy as the extreme polar opposite of Materialism. He gave unequivocal supremacy to spirit; it was Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, in which all things and all beings are involved and out of which, evolved. This was really his basic foundation. Of Nature he says, "Nature is not fixed, but fluid. Spirit alters, moulds, makes it."

I was altogether too young to grasp much of his system of philosophy in those days. It was too abstract for my young mind to even attempt to comprehend. But I remember that his Orphic sayings were an unknown tongue to the majority of mature years. A few will serve as illustrative of all of them.

Of organization he said: "Possibly organization is not a necessary function or mode of spiritual being. The time may come in the endless career of the soul when the facts of incarnation, birth, death, descent into matter, and ascension from it, shall comprise no part of her history; when she herself shall survey this human life with emotions akin to those of the naturalist on examining the relics of extinct races of beings; when

Alcott the Philosopher

mounds, sepulchres, monuments, epitaphs, shall serve but as memoirs of a past state of existence; as reminiscences of one metempsychosis of her life in time."

Of the **Teacher**: "The true teacher defends his pupils against his own personal influence. He inspires self-trust. He guides their eyes from himself to the spirit that quickens him. He will have no disciples. A noble artist, he has visions of excellence and revelations of beauty which he has neither impersonated in character nor embodied in words. His life and teachings are but studies for yet nobler ideals." This recognizes the grand truth that the ultimate of all educational processes or systems should be the preservation and development of the individuality of the pupil.

Of **Life**: "Life, in its initial state, is synthetic; then feeling, thought, action, are one and indivisible; love is its manifestation. Childhood and womanhood are samples and instances. But thought disintegrates and breaks this unity of soul; action alone restores it. Action is composition; thought, decomposition. Deeds executed in love are graceful, harmonious, entire; enacted from thought merely, they are awkward, dissonant, incomplete,—a manufacture, not creations, not works of genius."

Of **Genesis**: "The popular genesis is historical. It is written to sense not to the soul. Two prin-

ciples, diverse and alien, interchange the Godhead and sway the world by turns. God is dual. Spirit is derivative identity. Unity is actual merely. The poles of things are not integrated: creation globed and orbed. Yet in the true genesis Nature is globed in the material, souls orbed in the spiritual, firmament. Love globes, wisdom orbs, all things. As magnet the steel, so spirit attracts matter, which trembles to traverse the poles of diversity and rest in the bosom of unity. All genesis is of love. Wisdom is her form, beauty her costume."

This is perhaps the most paradoxical of his numerous Orphic sayings and the one most violently opposed to generally accepted tenets. When promulgated it met with a storm of ridicule and contempt from the leading papers of Boston, the aristocratic literary coterie of Beacon Street, the entire materialistic school of thought of the day, and even by many who in after years became Mr. Alcott's warmest friends and admirers. This criticism gave keen distress to his devoted wife and contributed very largely to the breaking up of his Boston Philosophical School. A letter of Mrs. Alcott's to her brother, Rev. Samuel J. May, says in part: "You have seen how roughly they have handled my husband. He has been a sufferer but not the less a sufferer because quiet. He stands to it, through all, that this is not an ungrateful, cruel world. I

Alcott the Philosopher

rail; he reasons and consoles me as if I were the injured one. I do not know a more exemplary hero under trials than this same 'visionary.' He has more philosophy than half the persons who are afraid he is thinking too much. His school is very small, or will be at the commencement of the next quarter. He will begin with about ten or a dozen here for the summer term. I sometimes think extreme poverty awaits us. With the idea comes before my mind a thousand enterprises and expedients. But oh! my girls! what exposure may they be subjected to! I do not woo doubt but I wed sorrow and I surely do not need that alliance to promote either my faith or hope. How ready men are to accuse; how slow to defend! I am no angel, though I expect to be one of these days. I have never aspired to any kind of a pinion but a goose-quill and I shall be very apt to flop that about when there is anybody who cares to see my flight."

During the second summer that I lived with them at Concord an elaborately bound volume addressed to Mr. Alcott arrived by post from Germany. I do not remember the name of the author or the title of the book save that it was written by a then famous German Philosopher. Imprinted upon the cover was a bust of Mr. Alcott and beneath it, in letters of gold, one of his "Orphic Sayings." I have never forgotten the ecstatic expression that

Alcott Memoirs

came upon Mrs. Alcott's face as she looked upon it, realizing it was something more than a mere compliment. To her it was a token of recognition from a high authority of her husband's fitness to rank among the famous thinkers of the day. She trod veritably upon air for days; and the manner in which she exhibited the book to friends who called was, I remember, in an indescribable blending of pride, dignity, and intense satisfaction.

I recall, in this connection, that it was but a few years after that Emerson's poem "Brahma" was published in an early number of the then new *Atlantic Monthly*. I am not certain but what it was in the initial number. I well recall that the storm of ridicule this poem caused, almost equaled in intensity that which descended upon Mr. Alcott's *Orphic Sayings*. It was as equally incomprehensible to the average reader. For a reason which immediately follows I insert here:

BRAHMA

If the red slayer think he slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same.
The vanished gods to me appear;
And one to me are shame and fame.

Alcott the Philosopher

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahma sings.

The strong gods pine for my abode,
And pine in vain the sacred seven;
But thou, meek lover of the good!
Find me, and turn thy back on Heaven.

As a remarkable evidence of the sympathy between the poet and the philosopher another of the latter's Orphic Sayings seems to me most appropriate, not only for similarity's sake as an interesting example of a prose and poetical treatment of the same thought, but because the prose outlines the fundamental principles of Mrs. Eddy's Christian Science almost uncannily, despite its predating this doctrine very many years.

“Evil has no positive existence. It has usurped a positive place and being in the popular imagination and by the imagination must be made to flee away into negative life. How shall this be done? By shadowing forth in vivid colors the absolute beauty and phenomena of good; by assuming evil not as positive but as negative; the dark background and blot in the picture by contrast. God alone is eternal good, eternal truth. Evil, like its prototype darkness, is not a thing at all but the absence of a thing.”

During years of adversity Mr. Alcott conducted his school in Boston. It was not a success, due as much to Harriet Martineau's scathing and merciless ridicule as to the methods and system of the teacher, whose ideas of instruction were based upon the Pestalozzi method. This was so novel, strange, and totally different from anything in American education, that all manner of derision was made of it. Mr. Alcott was really the pioneer of this kindergarten system in America and merely lived ahead of his day.

As an interesting example of the School's methods, I copy from my journal notes of the last session I attended in 1853. These sessions were always conversational and, in this instance, outlined the teacher's idea of a philosophical career. The subject of the evening was Plato, the discussion ensuing after Mr. Alcott's preliminary remarks upon the Greek and his philosophy.

Some one asked: "Do you think it makes any difference in regard to Oneness as a person or as a thing?"

Mr. Alcott: "I do not see how I could worship a thing, nor *the* thing, nor the thought. I don't see how I could worship a principle. I don't see how I could worship a law. I don't see how I could worship an idea. I *do* see how I could worship the Oneness that contains them all and out

Alcott the Philosopher

of which they all flow. Worship is not only necessary but essential. There was never a soul that did not worship. The very essence and life of the soul is worship. The babe, according to its capacity, worships the fair face that looks upon it and the orb from which it takes its nourishment. The belief in reminiscence or pre-existence, is not Plato's alone. It did not originate with him. He borrowed it from Egypt or the East and incorporated it into his philosophy believing it to be an unquestionable truth. If any one can remember when he did not remember himself, then must he be left to question and reason it out as he may; but if any one remembers when he did not remember, then it is plain there is a depth of memory in him that he has not sounded and that he is older than he knows. If his grandmother insists that she knows his age and has marked it in the family register grandmother may be pardoned for her delightful superstition about her grandchild's origin, even though present at his bodily advent. My impression is that the babe is as old as his grandmother; not that the babe descends into time and takes his body in the same period of the world that she does. Here is good history, correct chronology, important to family folk in these senses, but as soon as these transcend their senses by thought, they find themselves, babe and all, older

than they can tell."

Some one asked: "Did not Plato base his theory upon the fact that we have intuitions? That we can compare the ideas we receive consciously through the senses with the intuitions that come we know not whence?"

Mr. Alcott: "If Plato were to speak he might say it is because we contain all things within ourselves, we are older than all things visible, we predate all things visible because we preceded time and space, therefore can we translate ourselves out of time into space and look down upon our immortality. Why should it not be so? Why not have a perspective opening into eternity as well as an opening before us into futurity? Why should not the Godhead reveal himself through the prospects of memory as well as through the prospects of imagination? Through the recollections as well as through the instincts of faith and hope? If the soul is not older than the body it cannot be proven it will survive the body. So the fathers of the church believed; asserting that unless you can prove its pre-existence you have no evidence that it may not decay; for if the soul be an atom, or a coalesced body of atoms, matter only, mere perishable stuff, then what evidence is there it shall not dissolve? But if every atom of matter is animated, God embracing, then we are as immortal as Himself. So Plato

Alcott the Philosopher

taught. So Christ taught. Whoever needs other proof has none. Whoever hopes to prove his immortality by miracle or logic fails. The proof transcends understanding. It cannot be proved by one faculty alone but requires the united action of all the faculties."

This school of Mr. Alcott's, despite its failure, brought from all parts of the country very many distinguished men of learning who evinced a genuine respect for the man, his method, and his work. Some years afterwards when the success of "Little Women" made it financially possible, Louisa, whose love for her father was very devoted despite she had little sympathy with his transcendentalism, had erected in Concord a little house which was known as "The Alcott School of Philosophy." It was very simple and primitive following her father's wishes; resembling a tiny mission chapel with no ornament whatsoever, even the lumber remaining unpainted. It was no more successful than the Boston School, although it had the prestige and attendance of many noted people, including Emerson, Thoreau, F. L. Harris, Julia Ward Howe, and Louise Chandler Moulton.

Mr. Alcott lived his philosophy. He believed in it so thoroughly that to his intimates his daily life exemplified this point far more than his teachings or writings. I have read everything his able pen

has uttered. My most lasting impressions, however, are the memories of his simple Sunday afternoon talks. Upon these occasions he laid aside the language of his public utterances, substituting simple concise English expressed with such charm and direction that we elder children had no difficulty in fully comprehending him. I recall the general tenor and much of the phraseology of some of these delightful conversations; of one instance my journal records: "There are no limitations to ideas but there are certain principles from which must spring all true ideas and on the basis of which all principles must rest. A departure from these is an emergence at once into difficulties and doubts, into uncertainties and mischances."

"But," I asked, "how can one know these principles?"

"They are the light that lighteth every man that cometh in the world," he replied; "they appeal to every consciousness. It is not because men mistake them that they build upon them errors of philosophy or religion, but because they seek to bend these simple truths to suit conditions that do not accord with them. That is, they endeavor to take these foundation stones out of the Temple of Truth and fit them into a structure of their own. I will give you two or three principles that will be sufficient for your guidance through life, but will be of

Alcott the Philosopher

no avail unless you strive to fit them to your life and make them the foundation stones upon which to build your character.

First:—The Infinite Supreme, the creator of all life. God, our Father, and His inseparable co-relative man, our brother.

Second:—The divine in the human. This is the undying force within every human soul and its means of growth. It is the destiny of this divine spark to glow and finally shine forth in splendor. There is no power nor circumstance here or hereafter, that can control the development of this force.

Third:—The spirit and all its attributes in man are eternal.”

Mr. Alcott believed it was upon these principles, true in themselves, that false structures, false theological conceptions, among them total depravity, an endless hell of physical torture, immediate sanctification that permitted a murderer from a scaffold to enter the highest heaven, had been built. The result of all these he believed to be the shaping of the future into unnatural condition; a dead future separated from a living present. As he spoke, he became wonderfully radiant, I well remember. He defined the soul as an entity that, after the body was dead, lived on subject to a higher strata of the same moral, social, and intellectual laws as governed

Alcott Memoirs

the body ere dissolution. For Jesus the man, Mr. Alcott manifested a loving admiration and a tender regard. It was not worship.

One day I asked him if he thought Jesus held any vital relation to the living present. I cannot recall the details of his reply and my journal does not record it; but I remember that he believed Jesus held as real and significant a relation to humanity as He did when He died centuries before; and unfaltering faith in all the attributes, faculties, and power of the spirit of man compelled him to believe in the interpenetration of two spheres of being; that the law of sympathy alone was sufficiently possible to bring a man under the individual guidance and influence of Jesus Himself.

I remember this was to me an intensely interesting conversation. I was startled by his declaring any living man might truthfully assert, as did Jesus in substance, "I am the cause and producer of all things, for you can place no man outside of infinity." I think more than any other one thing Mr. Alcott's philosophy influenced my life course. I look back over the hills and valleys of memory and, seeing this, I gratefully acknowledge. As I write the vividness of imprint he made upon my boy mind in many conversations comes back to me as fresh and green as the first leaves in an April wood.

Alcott the Philosopher

I made copious notes in my journal without at the time fully realizing their consequence. This man was in many senses as a father to me as his wife was a mother to me. I had been brought up in extreme bigotry and here was a breadth of view that seemed to go to the other extreme coming from the lips of one I revered and loved, showing me a God quite different from the One my grandmother pointed out to me as constantly threatening fire and brimstone.

Later in my life, while still a young man, I evolved from these notes the theme and substance of a public utterance I delivered from a Michigan pulpit. I have been a practitioner of the two so-called learned professions. Before I began the study of medicine in New York City at the outbreak of the Civil War I had been a settled clergyman for a period of six years in Coldwater, Michigan. After my resignation as Professor of Materia-Medica at the New York Homœopathic Medical College for Women, where I spent five years of my life, I practiced medicine in New York, Boston, and my summer home in Glenora, N. Y., on Seneca Lake, until a few months ago when I reached my eighty-third year. It is nearly half a century, therefore, since I followed the ministry as a profession. But I well recall the particular address I refer to as having delivered from my

Coldwater pulpit. The Alcott philosophy upon which it was based is as purely and wholly true to-day as it was then, as unchanged in lovely beauty as the philosophy of Epictetus. In small part, I quote it here:

“Events record themselves as facts but progress as principles. The voice of true progress calls to every attribute of the soul and bids it ‘come up higher.’ The prophetic voice of the future speaks to intellect, conscience, and heart alike. It reaches the beauteous domain of art; it echoes through the writings of all the ages; it is the source of every creative inspiration; it permeates in its demand for better mechanism and higher achievements the workshop, factory and farm. It evolves the honest man, who to be such, must believe in the honesty of others, as it evolves the virtuous man, whom to be such must first believe in the virtue of others. To talk learnedly of God may be considered the mark of a Christian; but he only truly knows anything of God who reveals Him in his own life. Christianity is a power inasmuch and but just to the extent that it is a living fact. Christianity does not make Christians but Christians make Christianity. We wonder what life means with its cares and struggles, its trials and sorrows. In age or youth we can look back upon an unattained goal, a dreariness of routine, a tyranny of demand.

Alcott the Philosopher

But if we would see that the whole of life's business tends towards growth, that growth is just experience molding us into better men and women, then we truly look over petty mountains at the beautiful valley below. When we can fully realize this great truth, and then only, we welcome every experience, joyous or grievous, that comes to us."

Mr. Alcott's last literary effort was the poem written after the death of his beloved friend Emerson, which he read at Emerson's funeral. It was his final public word of mouth. Emerson was his nearest, dearest, most faithful and most genuine friend. He never recovered from the shock of the poet's death. Not long after the funeral, while he was correcting the proofs of a memorial, he was stricken with paralysis. The preceding spring he had written forty sonnets and the summer following delivered fifty lectures. He was then eighty-three years of age. For a period of six years he lived on, but as a helpless invalid. Louisa devoted herself unceasingly to his care until compelled by her own rapidly declining health to leave him in the care of others.

As soon as I heard of his paralysis I hastened to Boston. I wanted to see him again and tell him once more what an inestimable blessing I considered my connection with him and his family

Alcott Memoirs

had been to me. But I was unable. His attending physician had strictly ordered he should see no one save his attendants. This denial of a last opportunity to see Amos Bronson Alcott alive was one of the keen disappointments of my life.

“As the twig is bent the tree inclines.” During the most impressionable period of my youth this kindly good man shaped and molded me. He instilled within me elements of character that now as an octogenarian I can truthfully say I have aimed, with I hope a tiny success, to make the ruling principles of my life.

VI

ALCOTT THE ABOLITIONIST

MR. ALCOTT at a very early period became deeply interested in William Lloyd Garrison's Anti-Slavery movement. It at once appealed to his broad humanitarian spirit and he became one of its most ardent advocates.

In 1830, Garrison was arrested in Baltimore for "assault upon the person" of a sea captain who was taking a party of slaves from that city to New Orleans. He was released from prison through the efforts of Arthur Tappan, a Boston merchant, and subsequently came to Boston with the intention of creating his famed Abolitionist paper, the "Liberator." Desirous of giving three lectures in the city, he could find neither church nor theater that would open its doors to him. He thereupon decided to address an open air meeting on the Common, but an "infidel preacher" who had rented a hall in which he was holding meetings hospitably offered its use to the young orator and the lectures were given there.

Alcott Memoirs

Mrs. Alcott's brother, Rev. Samuel J. May, then in Boston on a visit, writes in his "Recollections" the following account of the impression he received from the first lecture: "I had not then seen this resolute young man. I had heard of his imprisonment, was eager to hear him, and went to Julien Hall on the appointed evening. My brother-in-law, A. Bronson Alcott, and my cousin, Samuel A. Sewall, accompanied me. Never was I so affected by the speech of man. When he had ceased speaking I said, 'This is a providential man, we ought to know him, we ought to help him. Come, let us go and give him our hands.' Mr. Sewall and Mr. Alcott went with me and we introduced each other. Mr. Alcott invited Garrison to his house. He came and we sat with him until past midnight listening to his discourse. That night my soul was baptized in his spirit and ever since I have been a disciple of and fellow laborer with William Lloyd Garrison."

Then followed five years during which Mr. Alcott, absorbed in other matters, remained quiescent in the Anti-Slavery cause but still as true as steel to principles imbibed from Garrison. Finally, in 1835, Garrison was mobbed in Boston. By strategy he was rescued from the fury of an angry pro-slavery mob that was bent upon lynching him and taken to Leverett Street jail. I think

Alcott the Abolitionist

it was upon this occasion he gave utterance to the famous sentence: "I will not hesitate, I will not prevaricate, and I will be heard." He was soon liberated, the excitement died down, and there was another period of comparative quiet.

In the meantime the Abolitionists were steadily gaining ground through the unwearied efforts of Garrison, the silver-tongued orator Wendell Phillips, and the "Boanerges of New Hampshire," Parker Pillsbury, whose nature was as rugged as the granite hills that encircled his birthplace, yet as tender in its depth as a woman's. He believed with Wesley, that slavery was the sum total of human villainies and some of his invectives against it were vigorously masterly in power of expression. Sarah and Angelina Grymke, South Carolina slave-holders, became ardent converts to Abolition, liberated their slaves under due process of law, sold their Southern estate, and removed to Philadelphia, where they joined the Society of Friends. They were both cultured women gifted with a brilliant oratory, and became well known in the North as anti-slavery lecturers. One of them afterwards married Theodore Weld, a distinguished New England educator, a compeer of Horace Mann, Stephen and Abbie Kelley Foster, Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Theodore Parker and George Thompson, the brilliant Englishman who participated in

the crusade instituted by William Wilberforce resulting in the banishment of slavery from all British possessions. Later in my life I became personally acquainted with all I have here mentioned, save, of course, Wilberforce, who died a little after my birth.

I was a red-hot little Abolitionist myself when but ten years of age. My grandmother sent me one afternoon to a little variety store in the vicinity of our home to purchase some few notions she was in need of. The store was kept by an old couple who were ardent Abolitionists. In its rear they kept a small circulating library containing all the Anti-Slavery books that had been published at that early period. While waiting my turn to be served I spied a book lying upon the counter. I took it up and was soon immersed in the horrors of slavery portrayed in most vivid language. I was fascinated, horror-stricken. There was a stool in a corner formed by a turn in the counter. I sank down upon it and read on and on, oblivious of my errand, of the lapse of time, and of everything else but the text before my eyes. I sat unnoticed until a maid came running in. She had been sent in search of me by my grandmother, who had become alarmed at my long absence.

I have looked back upon this experience as a genuine influence upon my life. It introduced me

Alcott the Abolitionist

to a much broader sphere of life than I could have otherwise attained. The old lady at the store was very kind to me. Seeing that I was interested in the subject that lay so near her heart, she encouraged me to call as often as I liked and prepared for me a little secluded nook in the rear of the store where I could read to my heart's content. Soon she told me of the lectures that were being given by Garrison, Phillips, and others. At once I was eager to attend them. My grandmother after much hesitation permitted me to do so, accompanied by a maid. I can therefore justly claim to have been figuratively brought up at the feet of these truly great men and women with whom I became later on personally acquainted, and several of whom remained my warm friends the remainder of their lives. I have never heard from other mortal lips such eloquence as theirs; it echoes still through the corridors of my memory. As they plead the cause of the oppressed black it seemed to me as if their lips had been touched with living coals from the altar of inspiration.

Events began to develop rapidly towards the crisis that culminated in the Civil War. The murder of Lovejoy, at Alton, Ill., stirred even the gentle Emerson to a white heat. Lovejoy was the editor and proprietor of an Abolitionist paper and his editorial denunciations of slavery so enraged

the pro-slavery element in Alton that his plant was destroyed, his press thrown in the river and he himself murdered. Emerson, usually honey-tongued, denounced this crime in bitter terms, and the serene and dignified Alcott was stirred to the depths of his being. This crime drew from Wendell Phillips his first public speech for the cause of Abolition. It was a scathing rebuke to the many merchants in Boston who were in sympathy with Southern slaveholders. Boston at this time was strongly pro-slavery and the Abolitionists were much in the minority.

Daniel Webster in his ambition to become President of the country changed his political views against, I fully believe, his own convictions. With the idea of Southern influence he coalesced with his political opponents in Congress and threw his able efforts in favor of the Fugitive Slave Bill which, becoming a law, empowered a slave holder to pursue a fugitive slave into any state in the Union, empowering him also to call upon the aid of a state's authorities in the recapture of his chattel and the forcing of him back into bondage. This was the death-blow of the Whig party. Webster was defeated for the Presidential nomination. I saw him as he passed through Boston on his way to his summer home at Marshfield after the National Convention. He was met at a station just

Alcott the Abolitionist

outside of the city and escorted to his residence on Summer Street. I think he remained in the city but one night. The most vivid impression of this occasion remaining with me is the expression upon his face. It haunted me for a long time. His large, luminous eyes had lost their fire and seemed sunken deep in their sockets and his features worn and haggard.

The defection of Webster was a heavy blow to the Abolitionist party, for they had looked upon him as their strongest and most able ally, their Gibraltar in their fight against slavery. The Fugitive Slave Bill, now a law, filled them with consternation. Eventually, however, it proved their strongest ally, since the efforts pursued in enforcing it so opened the eyes of thinking people to a policy that was bent upon making a slave-owning, slave-holding Oligarchy of the entire United States, that the ranks of the Abolitionists increased by tens of thousands.

The first attempt made to enforce this law was in 1851. An escaped slave, Shadrach, was arrested in Boston and held in confinement awaiting the arrival of his master, who had been notified of his arrest. Through a well-planned assault by some of the Abolitionists, Shadrach was rescued and the law frustrated.

In 1854 occurred the famous Anthony Burns

episode. The Alcotts had returned to Boston again and were living at the old house near the corner of High and Summer Streets. I was with them at the time. Burns, an escaped Virginia slave, was arrested in Boston and imprisoned in the court house. This created great indignation among Abolitionists, who protested that the court house should not be converted into a slave-pen. Judge Shaw, a most dignified jurist, condemned Burns to be returned to his master and, until the latter's arrival from Virginia, to remain imprisoned in the court house. The sentence was received with an intense excitement by no means confined to the city alone but pervading the whole state of Massachusetts.

To my astonishment I saw the serene, gentle, non-resistant Alcott transformed into a warlike belligerent. As soon as Burns was arrested he immediately started for Worcester to enlist for the work of rescue the assistance of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, returning with him to Boston. An Abolitionist vigilance committee had been formed soon after the Shadrach affair to meet like emergencies. Mr. Alcott had been faithful in his attendance upon all the meetings of this committee from its incipiency. A plan was at once formed for the rescue of Burns. At the appointed time for this rescue, an Anti-Slavery Convention was being

Alcott the Abolitionist

held in Faneuil Hall, bringing together many people from all over the state. The authorities became suspicious that an attempt at rescue was possible and stationed a marshal in the court house with a strong force of men. Previously to the trial the entrances had been protected with strong iron chains.

The rumor that the rescue would be attempted flew like wild-fire, bringing to the vicinity of the Court Square the greater number of an audience of curiosity mongers from the Anti-Slavery meeting being held in Faneuil Hall. The Abolitionist portion of the audience at this meeting were, with their leaders, nearest the platform and consequently their fellows, posted about the court house, found themselves surrounded by an antagonistic or indifferent crowd instead of their sympathizers and fellow rescuers. But a door was forced open nevertheless, two Abolitionists rushed through it, were overpowered, and ejected by the guards. During the mêlée a sheriff's deputy named Batchelder was slain. Thus was shed the very first blood in the direct issue that was to result in the Civil War. In a few moments the confusion was over, the sheriff's posse within the court house and the rescuers huddled about the court house stairway, inactive, but with drawn pistols covering the broken door. Within could be seen the brilliantly lighted empty hallway. After a moment of tense, nerve-racking,

silence there emerged from the crowd, deliberately and with an attitude of great peace in his venerable manner, Amos Bronson Alcott, philosopher, poet, writer, dreamer. As he ascended the steps alone, his familiar cane tapping the stone with a startlingly clear and leisurely sound, he paused. Turning to one of the ejected rescuers, he asked calmly: "Why are we not within?"

"Because," came the answer, "these people will not stand by us."

Without a word Mr. Alcott placidly continued his ascent, still slowly tapping his cane from step to step. A revolver shot was heard within, the bullet speeding past him without injury or in any sense affecting his motion. But just ere entering the door he paused again, turned, and without in the slightest manner accentuating or retarding his pace, retraced his steps. Marcus Aurelius or Epictetus might have been garbed in broadcloth upon the Boston court house steps, so like to their attitude was that of this venerable man.

The excitement about the city intensified. A crowd constantly filled Court Square by day and by night. The slave prisoner was guarded with most zealous care. Access to him was even denied lawyers and judges who had no connection with the case. Wealthy citizens offered to buy the man from his owner but he refused all offers. He was

Alcott the Abolitionist

bent, he said, upon winning the prestige of having defeated "the damned Abolitionists," and was "bound to take the nigger back if all hell stood in my way."

One day it was rumored the residence of Wendell Phillips would be mobbed upon the next evening and a delegation was chosen from the Vigilance Committee to guard the house and family. Mr. Alcott was one of the number and, as the others, was armed with a revolver. Just after dark Theodore Parker came to the house and went up to Mrs. Phillips' room where she, being an invalid, was confined, telling her she must arise and go with him as the house was liable to attack any moment. Mr. Phillips was not at home. For a moment Mrs. Phillips was badly frightened; then the true mettle within her asserted itself and she refused to leave. While Mr. Parker was pleading Mr. Phillips returned and, upon learning of the situation, sustained his wife in her attitude, scoffing at the idea of flight.

The body guard had by that time arrived and, despite Mr. Phillips' protestations, went upon duty. Nothing occurred; and it was afterwards learned the mayor had placed a strong force of policemen within a wide circle about the house to frustrate any lawless action. The next morning, Mr. Alcott, having breakfasted with Mr. Phillips, arrived

home just as we were rising from the table. He laid his pistol upon a side table and we gathered about him eager for the news of the night. The picture of the two younger girls comes vividly before me as I write. They stood with an expression of wonder and awe upon their faces glancing first at the revolver and then up at their father. I do not suppose either of them had ever before seen such a weapon. As for Mr. Alcott, I doubt if he knew the breech of the weapon from the barrel. With his Buddhistic reverence for life he had never trampled upon an insect. As I look back, I cannot imagine either Mr. Alcott or Mr. Emerson in connection with firearms and I do not believe either of them knew how to even manipulate a trigger. Yet both possessed in an eminent degree the qualifications that, in emergency, would give birth to true courage. This they both exemplified, as did Thoreau also, all through their Abolition experience.

Finally came the crucial hour in the excitement that had held the city in thrall for days; an excitement, it was said, unequaled since the Tea Party in Boston Harbor; the day Anthony Burns was to be legally returned to bondage by a government that constitutionally guaranteed to all its citizens the inalienable right "to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." All business was suspended this

Alcott the Abolitionist

Friday, June 2nd, 1854. I stood in Court Square a witness to this never-to-be-forgotten scene. The streets were thronged with people notwithstanding the mayor's proclamation warning the populace to stay within their homes. Through Court Square, Court Street, and the entire length of State Street to Long Wharf, where a United States Revenue cutter lay ready to carry back to Virginia this negro slave, many houses were draped in black, and the sidewalks were a seething mass.

First in the procession marched a force of militia followed by a strong body of openly-armed police. Behind these came a detachment of marines from a fort in Boston Harbor, dragging two field pieces. Directly behind these marched over a hundred marines with drawn cutlasses. They were formed in a hollow square, in the center of which walked Anthony Burns, the black, with his white master holding a handcuff to his slave's wrist. I could look directly into the negro's face. He had a well-shaped head, more Caucasian than African in outline, and an intelligent face with the saddest of expression upon it. The procession was greeted until it turned into State Street with hoots, groans, and hisses by the Abolitionists, which in turn drowned and were drowned by the cheers of the pro-slavery element in the crowd.

As the flash light of my memory is turned back

to that scene after a lapse of fifty-eight years, it stands out as vividly as yesterday and I can re-feel the impression it produced upon me. Upon some faces there rested an intense concentrated look as if the soul within were being stirred to its profoundest depths. Upon others, a sullen determined expression suggestive of drawn weapon and clenched fist. I wormed my way behind the hollow square. Less than half-way to the wharf there was complete silence, a sort of awesome hush, as if by a grave, save but for the clank of scabbard and the tramp of marching feet. A man close to me said: "It's like a military funeral without a military dirge." I can hear that man's voice still, so solemn and intense it was.

When I returned home quivering with excitement at the history I had witnessed, Mr. Alcott listened to me intently without a word of comment. He spoke not a word the rest of the day, except the grace at evening meal which came from his lips in slow and measured phrase.

I am perforce writing history as I trace these lines; but not calmly, phlegmatically, as historians record. As I have previously said and will likely say again ere this book is completed, these pages are in the main but partial memories of my boyhood and young manhood. That history which is interwoven therewith has been immortally chron-

Alcott the Abolitionist

icled by abler hands than mine. As I lay down my pen at the end of this page I see and think of but intimate personal detail dating back many years and not the historical facts connected thereto.

VII

FRUITLANDS

CHARLES LANE, the Englishman whose means permitted the launching of the Fruitlands experiment, was a contributor to the *Dial*, an enthusiastic transcendentalist, and a keen admirer of Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott, particularly the latter.

Fruitlands was about three miles from the town of Harvard, and scarcely a full mile from Still River Village. Its distance from Boston was about thirty miles. It had been an unnamed land-worn farm of about ninety acres ere Mr. Lane and Mr. Alcott bought it for the purpose of creating a modern utopia. The persons actually becoming members of the community they aimed to establish were, in addition to Mr. Lane and his son, William, Mr. and Mrs. Alcott and their four daughters—eight in number—one woman, Anna Page, and seven men, Isaac Hecker, afterwards known as “Father” Hecker, Christopher Green, Joseph Palmer, Abraham Everett, Samuel Larned, Charles Bowers, and H. C. Wright, an Englishman, who remained but a few weeks. The entire

Fruitlands

experiment lasted less than a year and ere the expiration of that time some of the party left the community for a practical mode of life elsewhere, leaving, at the final abandonment of the scheme, but the Alcotts.

Mr. Lane's enthusiasm at the outset is exemplified in a letter to Thoreau in which he said: "Fruitlands is very remotely placed without a road, surrounded by a beautiful green landscape of fields and woods. On the estate are about fourteen acres of wood; a very sylvan realization which only needs a Thoreau's mind to elevate it to classic beauty. The nearest little copse we have designed as the site for little cottages. Fountains can be made to descend from their granite sources on the hill-slope to every cottage. Gardens are to displace the warm grazing grounds on the south; and numerous human beings, instead of cattle, shall here enjoy existence. The farther wood offers to the naturalist and the poet an exhaustless haunt; and a short cleaning of the brook would connect our boat with the Nashua. Such are the designs which Mr. Alcott and I have just sketched as resting from planting we walked around this reserve."

It was but a little time, however, ere Mr. Lane's enthusiasm began to wane. Mrs. Alcott, who had to bear the full burden of housework for a family of sixteen people, told me a great deal about it

in after years, saying she marveled she came out of it alive. She could not afford help, the other adults were engaged in the manual labor attached to working the place, her children were young, the oldest thirteen and the youngest three. "I worked like a galley slave, Llewellyn," she said, "but mercifully the crash came in a few months or I should have died." In after years, Louisa, being asked in my presence if there had been any beasts of burden at Fruitlands, replied, "There was but one and she a woman."

The bill of fare was a dietetic curiosity, Mrs. Alcott told me. Mr. Alcott would not tolerate any food derived directly or indirectly from any animal and was enthusiastically autocratic in demanding obedience to his wishes. Animal food or its substances, he claimed, were poisonous, polluted the body, and through it penetrated and defiled the soul. Tea and coffee were tabooed and water the only beverage. All bread was made from unbolted flour or a mixture of barley and graham meal. Mr. Alcott insisted too that preference be given vegetables that matured above the ground, though they did eat potatoes, beets, and radishes.

I was staying at the Bowles Willard farm in the town of Harvard in the early summer of 1843. Shortly after my arrival there I heard a deal of gossip concerning some very strange people who

Fruitlands

were living about three miles out. Much of this gossip was exaggeration, some of it, fiction, but many points about it were based upon fact and confirmed to me within the next few years by Mrs. Alcott. The farmers of the surrounding neighborhood were uproariously hilarious over the methods of this craft as pursued at Fruitlands and particularly because Mr. Alcott would not permit the land-worn acres to be enriched upon the theory that it was an insult to nature to scatter any fertilizer upon her bosom and that the forcing of her processes was wholly unjustifiable. Much sarcastic comment was occasioned too over the fact that there was neither a horse, nor a cow, nor a pig, nor even any poultry upon the place. Mr. Alcott's reasons for this convulsed the surrounding tillers of the soil. He contended animals had equal rights as to life, liberty, and happiness, with mankind. The cow should not be robbed of her milk which belonged to her calf. Chickens had the same right to life as human babies. He even went to the extreme of directing that the canker worms infesting the ancient apple trees at Fruitlands should in no wise be disturbed, saying they had the same right to the fruit he had. All of these things were commented upon in Harvard, the farmers saying: "They have a lot of crazy fools out there."

I was in the habit of taking frequent walks with

Alcott Memoirs

a young woman some years my senior while at Bowles Willard farm and upon one of them told her of what I had heard. She replied: "You must not believe all the idle gossip of the country-side. I have been to see these people and they are refined, educated folk. Mrs. Alcott is a fascinating woman, her husband is a man of charm, and the second daughter is as bright as a new steel trap." I suggested we walk in their direction and that she present me. She agreed, but upon looking for her gloves, found she had left them at home. She would not listen to my importuning that she go without them and, to my disappointment, decided our walk should continue in the direction we had originally planned. That evening she was taken ill and shortly after returned to Boston. I could not, boy that I was, very well go to Fruitlands alone, so I not only lost the opportunity but a full year elapsed ere I made acquaintance with the family.

Many people at that time deemed Mr. Alcott and Mr. Lane insane. This belief has been discussed in a book by Dr. Tuke, an English alienist, who visited this country in 1885. He says: "Was Alcott insane? That such a man could induce others to imitate him and found such a community as at the farm of Fruitlands in Massachusetts would astonish were it an isolated case. But other persons passed through very similar phases about

Fruitlands

the same period in America. In an exhaustive study of Mr. Alcott, who interested me very much, I find no evidence whatsoever of mental disease, and I regard his *Fruitlands* idea as but an illustration of that peculiar psychological condition which under abnormal religious thought, will develop eccentric courses. A cold winter was sufficient to convert Mr. Alcott to common sense notions."

Mr. Alcott himself in after years looked back upon *Fruitlands* with a philosophical smile as he spoke of the extreme Utopianism of his acts there. One day, while I was with him upon the street in Boston, he met a friend who had experienced failure in a long cherished plan of business, and said to him: "That is failure when a man's ideas ruin him, when he is dwarfed mentally by it. But when he is ever growing by it, does not lose *himself* in any partial or complete failure, his substance is success, whatever it may seem to the world."

In her "*Transcendental Wild Oats*," Louisa, speaking of *Fruitlands*, says: "Brother Lion (Mr. Lane) domineered over the whole concern, for having the most money in the speculation, was resolved to make it pay, as if anything founded upon an ideal basis could be expected to do so, except by enthusiasts. Abel Lamb (her father) simply reveled in the newness, firmly believing that his dream was to be beautifully realized, and in time,

not only little Fruitlands but the whole earth would be turned into a Happy Valley. He worked with every muscle in his body, for he was deeply in earnest. He taught with his whole head and heart, planned and sacrificed, preached and prophesied, with a soul full of the purest aspirations, most unselfish purposes and desires for a life devoted to God and man, too high and tender to bear the rough usage of the world."

Ere the collapse of the scheme Mr. Lane and Mr. Alcott visited New York and called upon Mrs. Child, who in a letter said: "Alcott and Lane have called to see me. I asked: 'What brings you to New York?' 'We do not know ourselves,' replied Alcott. My husband and John Hopper were present the next day at a discussion between Alcott, Lane, and W. H. Channing. Upon his return I asked him what the conversation was about. 'Lane,' he said, 'divided man into three states, the unconscious, the conscious, and the unconscious. The unconscious was the state of swine, the conscious a baptism by water, the unconscious a baptism by fire.' I laughed and said, 'I cannot get that clear in my mind.' 'Well,' he replied, 'after I heard them talk for a few minutes I did not think I had any mind at all. They talked about mind and body, but as far as I could understand they seemed to think the body was a sham.' "

VIII

EMERSON

I SHALL never forget the impression made upon my boyish mind at my first meeting with Ralph Waldo Emerson. I was too young to form an opinion of value at the time, but in later years I sensed the meaning of it to me and realized the part this man of kindly and charming personality had, consciously or unconsciously to him, played in shaping my life course and helping me to do what it has been given me to do in the something over seventy years that have intervened.

I came in contact with him many times ere reaching maturity; in every instance with a recurrence, to a less profound degree, of this first impression. I did not quite know upon any of these occasions what this meant. I only recall with a keen vividness, as if it were yesterday, the sweet, gracious personality of the man, his wonderfully benevolent face, the tender sunshine of his eye, the indescribable gentleness of his voice. Without knowing or even wondering why, I felt as if under the soothing

- spell of all I describe.

It has been written that “a vast number of objects must lie before us ere we can think about them with understanding.” So are vast funds of experience essential ere we can realize the one or the ten that have molded our mental and moral qualities into whatever they may be. I look back upon my contact with this greatest American man of letters as if a window had been thrown open and through it entered all that was sweet and lovely, gracious and true. Years afterwards, long ere this impression had become as a part of me, when hearing of or reading Emerson, I read Carlyle’s description of Emerson’s first visit to him:

“He came from Dumfries in an old rusty gig—came one day and vanished the next. I had never heard of him. He gave us his brief biography. We took a walk while dinner was being prepared. We were glad to see him and gave him welcome. I did not then adequately recognize his genius but we thought him a beautiful transparent soul and he was ever after a very pleasant object to us in the distance. Now and then a letter comes from him amid the smoke and dust of the world; it is always as a window thrown open to the azure.”

I had gone with Mr. and Mrs. Alcott and the four girls to tea at Emerson’s home. As I was presented to him and looked up into his strong,

Emerson

sweet face he placed his hand upon my head and said a few words to me. I do not now remember what they were. But I still feel their kindly flower-like fairness and, later in my life, I understood what Margaret Fuller meant when she said: "It is his beautiful presence that I prize more than his intellectual companionship."

I remember upon that first occasion, as well as many others, either at his home or the home of the Alcotts, his tender, chivalrous devotion to his aged mother whose countenance expressed all the beatitudes in a dignified, gentle manner. I have many times seen Emerson, Alcott, and Thoreau together. The friendship between them was very profound; and between Alcott and Emerson a very beautiful thing that seemed to spring from a deeply understanding sympathy and a staunch steadfastness at the time when Alcott was much maligned and ridiculed.

Alcott has written of Emerson: "His life is like an antique marble full of undying beauty."

And Emerson has written of Alcott: "He is the most Godlike man I have ever seen. His presence rebukes, threatens and uplifts."

Much has been written of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Nothing I could add would matter. It was my high privilege to have received the blessing of his influence when a little boy and I bow my sil-

Alcott Memoirs

vered head in gratitude. To use his own words he gave to me:

“That great and grave transition,
Which may not king or priest or conqueror spare,
And yet a babe can bear.”

IX

THOREAU

I HAVE a keen recollection of the first time I met Henry David Thoreau. It was upon a beautiful day in July, 1847, that Mrs. Alcott told us we were to visit Walden. We started merrily a party of seven, Mr. and Mrs. Alcott, the four girls and myself, for the woods of oak and pine that encircled the picturesque little lake called Walden Pond. We found Thoreau in his cabin, a plain little house of one room containing a wood stove.

He gave us gracious welcome, asking us within. For a time he talked with Mr. Alcott in a voice and with a manner in which, boy as I was, I detected a something akin with Emerson. He was a tall and rugged-looking man, straight as a pine tree. His nose was strong, dominating his face, and his eyes as keen as an eagle's. He seemed to speak with them, to take in all about him in one vigorous glance. His brows were shaggy as in people who observe rather than see.

He was talking to Mr. Alcott of the wild flowers in Walden woods when, suddenly stopping, he

said: "Keep very still and I will show you my family." Stepping quickly outside the cabin door, he gave a low and curious whistle; immediately a woodchuck came running towards him from a nearby burrow. With varying note, yet still low and strange, a pair of gray squirrels were summoned and approached him fearlessly. With still another note several birds, including two crows, flew towards him, one of the crows nestling upon his shoulder. I remember it was the crow resting close to his head that made the most vivid impression upon me, knowing how fearful of man this bird is. He fed them all from his hand, taking food from his pocket, and petted them gently before our delighted gaze; and then dismissed them by different whistling, always strange and low and short, each little wild thing departing instantly at hearing its special signal.

Then he took us five children upon the Pond in his boat, ceasing his oars after a little distance from the shore and playing the flute he had brought with him, its music echoing over the still and beautifully clear water. He suddenly laid the flute down and told us stories of the Indians that "long ago" had lived about Walden and Concord; delighting us with simple, clear explanations of the wonders of Walden woods. Again he interrupted himself suddenly, speaking of the various kinds of lilies grow-

ing about Walden and calling the wood lilies, stately wild things. It was pond lily time and from the boat we gathered quantities of their pure white flowers and buds; upon our return to the shore he helped us gather other flowers and laden with many sweet blossoms, we wended our way homewards rejoicingly. As we were going he said to me: "Boy, you look tired and sleepy; remember, sleep is half a dinner."

I saw him afterwards very many times in the company of his most intimate friends, Mr. Emerson and Mr. Alcott. He often came to our home; indeed, aside from visits to his father, mother, sisters, and Mr. Emerson, he visited no one else. Upon some of these occasions I remember him saying "that he had a great deal of company in the morning when nobody called;" and "I have never found the companion who is so companionable as solitude." I also remember, "in Walden Woods I hunt with a glass; for a gun gives you but the body while a glass gives you the bird." He possessed to an uncanny degree a knowledge of flowers, plants, and trees. He kept a careful calendar of the shrubs and flora about Walden and showed it me in explanation many times.

The land upon which his cabin was built had been given him by Emerson; the cabin he built himself at a cost of less than thirty dollars and for

the first nine months of his life in it his expenses amounted to sixty-two dollars. He thus proved that most of us waste our time and substance upon superficialities, that one hundred dollars per year will suffice for one's living expenses, and that, best of all, one could really live and still have two-thirds of one's time to one's self.

Perhaps no single figure among American literary men has moved so many able pens in essay and biography as Henry David Thoreau. Here again, as in my reminiscences of Emerson, aught I could add would not matter.

This is but a record of youthful memory; its aim is to compass nothing else. During the nearly sixty years since Thoreau's death I have read, I think, all that has been said about him. But among it nothing has, nor do I believe ever will, be better said than a paragraph from Emerson's funeral tribute to his dead friend: "He has in a short life exhausted the capabilities of this world; wherever there is knowledge, wherever there is virtue, wherever there is beauty, he will find a home."

X

MARGARET FULLER

OF gifted Margaret Fuller I retain a most vivid impression. She often visited the Alcotts during my life with them. I remember one occasion when at tea in the Alcott's Concord home, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Margaret Fuller sat at the table with Mr. and Mrs. Alcott, Louisa, her three sisters, and myself. I have long since realized this was a golden hour in my life; that six of the eleven people about that kindly board were destined, each in their own particular literary sphere, to ultimate lofty status in American letters.

Margaret Fuller was a "beautifully plain" young woman. Physically she was a robust person, tall, and with a certain stateliness though inclined to corpulency. She was possessed of expressive gray eyes, a wealth of reddish brown hair, a colorless complexion, and magnificent teeth, which she showed constantly while speaking. Despite a queenly carriage to the head she had nothing of what is called "handsome" in its application to a woman. She had a habit of incessantly opening

Alcott Memoirs

and closing her eyes, rather than “winking,” and her voice was nasal in tone. But her whole face, notwithstanding her mannerisms, was stamped with individuality and her manner full of a studious dignity. Her genius found its best expression in conversation wherein she had a most extraordinary ability. Before she was thirty she was thoroughly conversant with French, German, Spanish, and Italian, as well as her native English, and was also an accomplished Greek, Latin, and Hebrew scholar. She had Plato, Seneca, Epictetus, and Horace at her fingers’ ends. She had a most keen regard for Mr. Alcott and discoursed much with him upon the writings and philosophy of these ancient masters.

I remember hearing her speak with Mr. Alcott of her experiences in teaching French and Latin in that philosopher’s Boston school in 1837, and mentally recording I was only seven years old at that time. As a little boy and a recognized member of the family, Margaret Fuller has spoken to me perhaps forty times, simple words of greeting whose substance I do not remember save that upon one occasion she mentioned she was twenty-one years my senior and that her birthplace in Cambridge was within a stone’s throw of the house in which I first saw the light upon January 29th, 1830.

Her career as advisory professor to Harvard

Margaret Fuller

students, as editor of the *Dial* co-jointly with Emerson, her famous Boston “conversazioni,” her connection with the New York *Tribune*, her Italian experiences with her marriage in Italy to the Marquis Ossoli, and her tragic death at sea have no place in these memoirs of my boyhood days. With her young brother, Arthur Fuller, I attended on Nov. 26, 1844, one of the last of her six and final series of “conversazioni” in Miss Peabody’s rooms, West Street, Boston. I cannot recall its substance but I well remember the deep and fascinating general impression left upon my young mind.

(The above is quoted from my father’s Alcott Paper in his handwriting.)

XI

HAWTHORNE

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE I met but twice, upon occasions of his visits to the Alcott house in Concord, during my first summer with the family there and the second of my acquaintance with them. The house had been his property and home ere accepting the position of Collector of Customs at Salem and his first visit was in partial connection with the sale of this house to his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Alcott.

I remember that he smiled and touched my shoulder when Mr. Alcott in presenting me said, "Nathaniel, this is little Llewellyn." He was a strikingly handsome man, I thought, with wonderfully luminous eyes. After his departure Mr. Alcott said to me: "Llewellyn, that gentleman is a supremely gifted writer."

The second occasion was some weeks later when with Emerson he came to tea. He touched my shoulder again and said: "Greeting, my boy." He took little part in the conversation and I remember he impressed me as a silent and reserved gen-

Alcott Memoirs

tleman with whom I thought it would be very difficult for a boy to reach familiar terms. His place in these memoirs is perforce but a recording of his illustrious name.

XII

THOMAS STARR KING

ICOUNT it as a high privilege to have been constantly associated for ten months of each year for four successive years with Thomas Starr King. During this time he prepared me for Harvard College Divinity School and I, in return, acted as his amanuensis, writing at his dictation his eloquent sermons, lectures, and inspiring magazine articles.

At a meeting of the Harvard Club in Rochester in 1912, I mentioned this fact to President Eliot, who was present, when he remarked: "That was a liberal education in itself."

Although Mr. King was but six years my senior his ability as a sympathetic instructor and his charm of manner are an abiding memory with me. Most skillfully did he pilot me through the intricacies of Latin and Greek and wonderfully clear, I remember, were his comments and elucidations upon the writings of Locke, Jeffrey, and Stuart. He many times told me that to him the most fascinating study in all literature was that of ancient Greece. He had the keenest admiration for a people who, he

Thomas Starr King

said, "are the first we meet at the dawn of European history and whose influence in the arts of sculpture and architecture is our keynote to the beautiful." It was through Mrs. Alcott that I was originally brought in contact with Mr. King and in this presentation was born a friendship that ceased only at his death in 1864, although we never met after 1858, when I removed to Coldwater, Michigan.

Thomas Starr King was truly an orator. He was slight of build, active and agile of movement, with expressive gray eyes and a wealth of blonde hair. I never saw as beautiful golden hair upon a man's head. He was neither a handsome nor a homely man. He had a most kindly, gentle speaking voice in every-day conversation and a constant winning smile. His whole scheme of life was to live "doing the right," and I think he succeeded as near as any man can. His heart was overflowing with benevolent, tender thought for all mankind and the entire influence he radiated was of a high and wide nobility. His intellectual wealth was very vast and constantly distributed wherever he went in a seeming prodigal manner with a personal charm quite indescribable. At his home in Burroughs Place, Boston, he was like the sunlight and as lovely as a May flower in his tenderness and devotion to his mother. I cannot recall an

hour during the forty months I was a student under him when he was not genial, gentle, and frank. The subjects of the sermons and lectures I wrote as he dictated were very varied, full of glowing and creative imagination, clear reasoning, and earnest eloquence. They were practically delivered as he dictated, requiring but the veriest iota of editing.

The most brilliant work of his short life was in California. The liberal faith that he went to expound upon the shores of the Pacific was languishing upon his arrival there, but in a relatively short time he built upon a firm foundation a rich and popular church and, ere his death, made from its pulpit a mark for all the ages in favor of liberal theology. But the most noble and brilliant work he did in California was the personal influence he brought to bear in keeping the State loyal at the time of the Rebellion. It has been admitted that no one single man or issue wielded more powerful and successful effort in this direction.

His biography, save in the brief outline I have given, has no place in these memoirs yet, in a sense, is a certain part of them, for I count his influence upon my life as one of great good which, please God, I pray I have profited in and by.

After his death Bret Harte wrote a poem which gracefully and with lyrical quality expresses the

Thomas Starr King

man and his work. It was entitled: "On a Pen of Thomas Starr King's." It seems to me fitting that I append it here:

This is the reed the dead magician dropped,
With tuneful magic in its sheath still hidden,
The prompt allegro of its music stopped,
Its melodies unbidden.

But who shall finish the unfinished strain,
Or wake the instrument to awe and wonder,
And bid the slender barrel breathe again,
An organ pipe of thunder?

His pen! what humble memoirs cling about
Its golden curves! what shapes and laughing graces
Slipped from its point when his full heart went out
In smiles and courtly phrases!

The truth, half jesting, half in earnest flung,
The word of cheer, with recognition in it;
The note of alms, whose golden speech outrung
The golden gift within it.

But all in vain the enchanter's wand we wave;
No stroke of ours recalls his magic vision;
The incantation that its power gave
Sleeps with the dead magician.

POSTSCRIPT

THE INFLUENCES THAT MOLD

FROM a mass of fascinating data covering a wide range of beautifully recorded thought extending over a period of seventy years in the life of Dr. Willis, I have selected, arranged, and classified the foregoing papers. I have read vast quantities of matter, journals, essays and lectures upon many subjects, sermons, philosophical and general comment upon recent and by-gone topics, in orderly sequence and rough memoranda, hand written upon all sorts of paper, even in some instances the backs of correspondence and envelopes. I have noted the forming hand of youth, the vigorous hand of manhood, the feeble hand of three score and ten, the tremulous hand of an octogenarian; and withal, never failed to find upon or between the lines, the humanity and integrity of the man, the kindness and courtesy that predominated within him.

My work, originally approached as an interesting literary task, developed into a labor of love in which I have sensed very acutely a close intimacy, formed a genuine friendship, felt the true beauty

The Influences That Mold

of a personality with whom I never had personal contact. As amid the peace and charm of this beautiful Seneca country I write these words in valediction, in a tiny cottage upon Dr. Willis's acres, upon the shore of the noble lake he loved full well, within a few minutes' stepping from the house in which much of his work was accomplished, the aroma of all that was good, and fine, and high, and noble, yet most of all kindly in the man, rises faintly strong as a subtle perfume about me.

Since this little book is but the recording of Alcott impressions and associations I have perforce laid aside, not without some effort and always with full regret, very much of literary charm having other application.

Upon the wall over my writing table are two memoranda tremulously written upon the backs of envelopes which, from their postmarks, prove their penciling less than a year prior to Dr. Willis's death. They seem to me, above all other matter, the keynotes to his character, as they seem to me also exemplary of the foundation, upbuilding, and realizations of his life's aims. One bears directly upon these memoirs. The other is the speaking man to whom I here pay tribute:

"During the most impressionable period of my youth they had stimulated within me all those nobler elements of

character that I ever afterwards struggled to make the ruling principles of my life."

"The old age of heart and the old age of mind are the only old ages to be feared and dreaded. Never let them trespass upon you. Kindness and consideration in all weather towards all mankind are the armors against them."

Nothing in the writings of Dr. Willis has impressed me as this last thought penciled, no doubt, the moment his mind formed it. And nothing could make more clear the fact of the continuity of good and evil through the influences of other lives. Courtesy, chivalry, sympathy, the constant radiation of kindness in a life, have their direct and indirect influences upon every other life with whom it comes in contact. It requires no great stretch of imagination, then, to see and understand that Mr. and Mrs. Alcott, their home life, their mutual high ideals, the motherly, loving nature of the woman, the liberal theology and gentle philosophy of the man, made Dr. Willis what he was and through his mental inheritance from them, in turn influenced for betterment, for emancipation, for uplift, the hundreds of other lives with whom in a dual professional capacity he came in contact.

Here was an old man as measured in years, yet ever young in an eternal youth of mind and heart.

The Influences That Mold

Here was constant kindness from boyhood through manhood to nearly fifteen years past the allotted three score and ten. Here was full exemplification that with these qualities there is for any of us but the mere old age of years. And here too is proof inviolate that all the millions of the earth hold within keeping the means to these ends. There is no man in any clime but can ever be as young as the beauty of a Spring morning, as full of radiance and gentle vigor as the new leaves and blossoms upon the apple and cherry trees rising in charming beauty upon the Glenora hills behind me.

As in Dr. Willis so in every one of us, lives the manna which, mocking at mere years, can nourish a lifelong youth. For the earnest seeker this youth of the head and the heart is as easily found as a wild violet in May. But brush aside the leaves of envy, malice, greed, anger, and ruthless ambition, and the violets of human love are found waiting with drooping stem ready, if watered from the springs of human kindness, to arise in simple glory. Ever within the soul this undrying spring awaits, to be uncovered by a kindly smile, a kindly word, a kindly deed, a loving and unselfish action.

No man lives but has at his command that which is perpetual law to a flower. Not a flower blooms that does not say: do something to express the beautiful. Not a breath of a flower's incense reaches a

nostril that does not say: breathe out the inner life in some act of gentleness.

To carry into daily life, no matter what its sphere, the comprehension that the most apparently unimportant expression may be kindly uttered is pregnant with deep meaning. To his intimates it was Emerson's personality more than his giant intellect that made them love him.

To translate love into simple action means a magical transformation in mental horizon. Dull, commonplace, prosaic things are touched as by a magician's wand. A "smile follows as the night the day." Labor, physical or mental, ceases to be a burden, a mere bread-winning thing. Every task, high or low, menial or supreme, will then point to a high nobility. To feel and understand this law of love means knowledge, which also means forbearance, which spells kindness. By a law of spiritual gravitation this kindness will mingle with kindness in others, assimilate it, diffuse itself, return to the giver as "bread upon the waters," soften lives that are cold, hard, stern, concerned only with selfish to-days, and create here in this life a real to-morrow.

HENRI BAZIN.

Hope Cottage, Glenora, N. Y.

May, 1915.

**RETURN
TO** 

MAIN CIRCULATION

ALL BOOKS ARE SUBJECT TO RECALL
RENEW BOOKS BY CALLING 642-3405

DUE AS STAMPED BELOW

JUL 5 1995

SEP 19 1969

FORM NO. DD6

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY
BERKELEY, CA 94720

berkeley

U. C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES



CD42542722

392339

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

